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The Claims of the Bible to a Place in our Schools.

AN

A D D R E S S

BY

REV. J. E. RANKIN,

OF

ST. ALBANS, VERMONT,

Delivered before the Vermont Teacher's Association, at St. Johnsbury, Aug. 15, 1860; also read before the North-Western Association, at Milton, Aug. 22, and published by their request.

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A D D R E S S

To the Christian statesman and patriot, it is a question of most absorbing interest, into whose possession shall descend the glorious heritage of civil and religious freedom which our fathers purchased at such a price; and of which they have constituted us and our children forever, the rightful executors, guardians and heirs. *Who shall inherit* these green hills and these fertile fields, first wrested from the hands of the oppressor, and then reclaimed from the dominion of a wild, stern and unyielding nature; whose every vale has listened to their tread, whose every forest has rung with the echoes of their axe, and been made vocal with their morning and evening worship to Jehovah; where they toiled, and struggled and died, and where their ashes still sleep in the hope of a blessed resurrection. What moral, what religious character shall belong to those who come after them; who occupy the same dwellings, where they once gathered a reverent household around the family altar; who look out upon the same mountains; who plow the hill-side or the meadow fertilized and beautified by their industry, and plod homeward at evening in foot-paths first trodden and hallowed by their worthy feet? What shall be the moral and religious character of those who fabricate metals, or guide the looms in our manufactories; who are found in our workshops, counting-houses, offices and pulpits; who are our legislators, judges and governors, in the generations that are to come? Shall we become unlike and unworthy of our Puritan fore-fathers? Shall we lose their reverence for God, His inspired word, His holy day, His sacred name; and deteriorate into free-thinkers, pantheists, infidels and atheists?

The answer to these inquiries is to be determined less by what is transacted in halls of legislation, courts of justice, or even in our Academies, Colleges and Churches, than by what is done in our households, and in our Sunday and Common Schools. Next to parents themselves, the moral moulding and training of children and youth is in the hands, and at the disposal, of those who are employed to preside in our schools. And what appliances has God furnished to assist them in accomplishing this work? I answer unhesitatingly, there is none so potent, there is none so important, as the daily use of the Bible.

In his treatise on the "Evidences of Christianity," Dr. Chalmers remarks that

the apologists for the Christian system have given up too much to the suspicions of the opposite party; have yielded their minds to the infection of their skepticism, and maintained through the whole process, a caution and a delicacy which is frequently excessive; and by which, in fact, they have done injustice to their own arguments." Now, it seems to me, that this is very much the attitude which some Christian men occupy, respecting the use of God's Word in our Common Schools.— They are unnecessarily timid and nervous. Instead of planting themselves firmly upon the principles of right and duty, and there awaiting the assault of the enemy if it must come, they deprecate the necessity of assuming *any positive position*. They beg to be *excused* from regarding the Word of God a *Puritan institution*, a *Protestant birthright*, whose authority, foreign prejudice shall not be permitted to disturb. They appear afraid openly to commit themselves in defence, of what Chief Justice Story has eloquently styled, "the common inheritance, not merely of Christendom, but of the whole world." And of this delicacy, this timidity, those who fear the influence of God's Word, are not slow to take advantage. This hesitating, only half-persuaded front, it is easy to turn. It is of the utmost consequence, then, to inquire, What are the claims of the Bible to a place in our schools? By whose authority, and to what end do we find it there? What is its proper position, and why should it be permitted to retain it? In discussing this subject, I shall speak of the **LITERARY, MORAL AND RELIGIOUS CLAIMS OF GOD'S WORD TO A PLACE IN THE COMMON SCHOOLS OF VERMONT.**

To advocate the use of the Bible in our Schools, because of its *literary* character, may appear almost derogatory to its Divine Author, and to the high subjects of which it treats. It is like estimating the

number of carats-fine in the gold-setting of some priceless gem. And, yet, however inferior the *literary*, compared with the *spiritual* value of the Bible, it has positive and unequalled merits in this direction also. Were it not that this volume had been made the vehicle of prophecy and the medium of imparting moral and religious instruction which can be found nowhere else, its claims in the department of literature, would be much more palpable, and more generally acknowledged. Did it come to us as the *uninspired* production of Moses, Isaiah Paul and John, we should readily admit, that here we have masterpieces in history, poetry, logic, sentiment and philosophy.

The officers sent by the chief priests and Pharisees to apprehend the Savior, came back with the reply, "*Never man spake like this Man.*" So, too, it may be said of the Bible, "*Never book was written like this Book.*" And, yet, such is the solemnity and eternal importance of the themes discussed, the doctrines are so supernatural and sublime, the arguments so convincing, and the eloquence so masterly and overpowering, that our attention is wholly diverted from any appreciative criticism of the simplicity, fitness and variety of its style, the graphic power of its figures, and the strength and pertinence of its diction. Is one fond of history? There he finds a record of civil and political changes which succeed each other with life-like vividness and rapidity. The family develops itself into the tribe, the tribe into the nation, and then nation arrays itself against nation, and ventures everything upon the arbitrament of the sword; while *in all, above* all these mighty movements of kingdoms and kings, appears the evidence of a Divine agency, a witness that God is in history. Is one seeking for masterly achievements? He will find them in the exodus of the Israelites under Moses; their conquests under Joshua;

their sovereignty under David. Has he a taste for poetry? What pictures of pastoral life in the history of the patriarchs! No idyl ever had better basis than the love-labors of Jacob; no ballad such materials as the exile, the afflictions and final success of Joseph, the son of his love; no drama richer incidents, wider contrasts, or more grateful and instructive *denouement* than the life of Job. Would he have poetry of higher order and deeper significance? Let him listen to the notes of wild majesty, which "the rapt Isaiah" strikes from his prophetic harp; let him catch the sadly-sustained cadences of Jeremiah; or let him turn over the burning pages of John's beatific vision, taking his stand in the midst of that "stupendous scenery,"* and hear these mysterious trumpets, and thunderings and voices. Has he a taste for unadorned grandeur? Let him view that chaos and darkness, out of which the creative voice of God is bringing order and light; or let him in imagination hear the passing away of the heavens, and witness the gathering of all nations to the judgment of the Great Day. Does he delight in abstract reasoning? Let him give himself up to the guidance of the Apostle to the Gentiles. He will need Grecian culture, Roman breadth, and Saxon strength, and then he will fall far behind the strides of his mighty guide.

These are some of the chief varieties of *matter*. The *style* is correspondingly various; the contribution of many different minds, acting freely and normally, and yet under the inspiration of the Spirit of God; and producing a literary thesaurus, a very treasury of models in every department of the world of letters. So that it is true in history, ethics and philosophy, as Schlegel says, it is true in poetry, that the books of the Bible "form a fountain of godlike inspiration, from which the greatest of minds have never been weary of drinking;

which have suggested to them their noblest thoughts and images, and animated them for their most magnificent flights." And, yet, as the same author remarks, not one of those great Christian poets who have taken either their subjects or their models from the Scriptures,—not Dante, Tasso, or Milton—though resembling their original in individual traits of sublimity, *not one* has been able to sustain a successful imitation of the faultless simplicity of the Bible.

The children and youth in our schools are now forming their literary tastes and habits. We make selections from Addison, Burke, Chalmers, Channing and Webster; from Milton, Shakespeare, Byron and Bryant, that these pupils may have in the books which they daily read, the best models for sublimity, beauty, strength and grace of thought and of style. And, yet, without one single exception, these and all other great modern writers have been more indebted to the Bible, than to any other means of literary culture, which they have ever enjoyed. We all admire the calm and sustained, the vigorous and energetic periods of a Webster. *The Bible* is the very fountain at which, in those sequestered wilds of New Hampshire, by his mother's knee, and in common schools he derived his first lessons in literary and intellectual culture. So, also, we are enchanted by the stately and yet melodious numbers of Milton,—who like a Prospero of the mind, creates and uncreates, peoples and unpeoples, as though nothing in heaven, earth or hell were too daring for him to attempt, or too difficult for him to accomplish. And, yet, where received the peculiar type of his thought, his doctrines, his inspiration, nay his very material, but from the word of God? Remove from the "PARADISE LOST" all that its author derived from inspired sources, and what would remain? Argument, style, language such as are there, would be im-

possible. Says one,† whose authority in literature, no Vermonter should readily question: "The source whence Milton drew his inspiration was the sacred Book. Without a thorough familiarity with that volume, such poetry and such prose as that of Milton can neither be produced, nor comprehended; for the knowledge of the Bible is not merely suggestive of the loftiest conceptions, but in awakening the mind to the idea of the infinite, it confers the power of originating, as well as appreciating them."

The question, then, is simply this: Shall we, for the purposes of literary and intellectual culture, put into the hands of our children, the Bible—this model of models—this wonderful book, whose history, poetry, narratives and philosophy, are confessedly beyond the reach of unaided man, and indebtedness to which, even some of the most ungodly of writers have been compelled to acknowledge; or shall we take away the *great original*, and give them only the inferior imitations? Shall we prefer selections from the writings of *men*, great and gifted though they be, to this product of infinite Intelligence, Wisdom, and Love? Will we give up this well of English undefiled, from which all minds are free to draw for themselves—this very bloom and fruitage of Saxon beauty and strength—this volume, in which our tongue is made glorious and eternal, even though Shakespeare and Milton had never written, or should perish forever—for the choicest compilation which can be made from the uninspired writings of all men, and all ages?

Says the same accomplished scholar whom I have quoted above, "With our Puritan Ancestors, the *Bible* was the text book of parental instruction; it was regarded with fond and reverent partiality as the *choicest classic of the School*. And it is to early familiarity with its pages, to

its persevering study and its daily use, that we must chiefly ascribe the *great intellectual power* of the English Puritans of the 17th century; and the remarkable metaphysical talent of many of their American descendants." The same New England peculiarity has forced itself upon the attention of observing foreigners. Says a distinguished English gentleman,* who traveled extensively in this country in the years 1849 and '50: "I was especially struck by the high standard of intelligence, and the general mental superiority which prevailed among the inhabitants of New England." In attempting to account for this superiority, this intelligent traveler was unable to find a satisfactory solution of the problem, by attributing it to peculiarities in race, religion or political institutions. For in the settlement of New England every English county had furnished, at least, a single emigrant; similar religious views were entertained by communities on the Continent, without leading to the same intellectual superiority; and the same political institutions were enjoyed by the other free States of the Union. And yet with but a single exception—that of the late Washington Irving—every American author, then living, who had an English reputation, was by *birth a New Englander!* Further investigations led this gentleman to the conclusion, that this intellectual pre-eminence of New England, was owing to *her system of Common Schools*: and in order to remove from the English mind the prejudice, that these schools must be either *sectarian* or *irreligious*, he addressed a Circular of Inquiries upon this point, to such men as Daniel Webster, Everett, Bancroft, Winthrop, Hillard, Dr. Sears and others. An examination of their testimony will find its proper place under our second topic: which is, *The Moral Claims of the Bible to a Place in our Schools.*

† Hon. George P. Maerh.

* Hon. Edward Twistleton, late Chief Commis-

In this discussion, I shall use the word *moral* in distinction from *religious*; though strictly speaking, there is no *morality*, which has not its basis in *religion*: but it is frequently convenient to distinguish the duties which we owe to *man* from those we owe to *God*; though, in reality, we owe them *all* to God. What, then, is the moral influence of the habitual use of, and frequent reference to, the Word of God upon our schools themselves? Every school is a little world by itself, where the government is a monarchy, limited or unlimited, a republic, or a fierce democracy. Every school has its administration party and its opposition party—its demagogues and its statesmen. And it would be a most curious investigation as Dr. Arnold suggests,† to search out the qualities and points of character which constitute leaders and heroes—aye and heroines, too—in our school-boy days. Is it not too true, that the standard of morality in our Common Schools is very low? that *honesty*, *veracity* and *diligence* are qualities lightly esteemed; while those who excel in *adroitness* and *reckless mischief* and in *physical prowess*, as among the ancients, are constituted gods and demigods? *Goodness* is a characteristic for which there is little appreciation or demand. *School-boy morals* are a thing by themselves. What would be considered dishonorable in any other sphere, is regarded as not only right, but even heroic. *Prevarication*, *subterfuges*, and even *downright and unblushing falsehood*, if successful, are very pardonable offences. What corrective to these false principles can be found, like the Word of God? The moral condition of the School itself—even if we look no further—demands something more potent, more authoritative than human instructions.

In reply to the Circular of Inquiries

† Vid. Art. Bib. Sacr. Vol. VIII., by Rev. E. O. Winne, D. D.

above alluded to, Mr. Webster writes:

“I have been familiar with the New England system of free schools for above fifty years, and I heartily approve of it. I owe to it my own early training. In my own recollection of these schools there exists, to this moment, a fresh feeling of the sobriety of the teachers; the good order of the school; the reverence with which the Scriptures were read, and the strictness with which all moral duties were enjoined and enforced. In these schools, or it may be partly by my mother’s care, I was taught the elements of letters so early, that I have never been able to remember a time, when I could not read the New Testament and did not read it. In my opinion, the instruction communicated in the free schools of New England, has a direct effect for good on the morals of youth. It represses vicious inclinations; it inspires love of character; and it awakens honorable aspirations. I have no doubt that the system of instruction in the Common Schools of New England promotes religious sentiments; encourages a reverence for the Scriptures; and tends always indirectly, and sometimes directly, to the formation of a religious character in the pupils.”‡

By Mr. Bancroft it is stated, that “the Common School system of New England has been of incalculable service to the promotion of morality; and makes the whole population susceptible of a higher degree of knowledge on subjects connected with religion.” He says, that he can “hardly use language strong enough, to express his sense of the benefit done by the Common School system to the character, vigor of enterprise, morality, industry, general self-respect, love of liberty, respect for law, and attainments in religious knowledge of the people of New England.”

Such, in substance, is the testimony of

‡ Dr. Ryerson’s Report for 1854, page 175, Appendix.

all those eminent men, whose names have been quoted above. They all agree that *nothing sectarian* can possibly find introduction, or would be for one moment permitted, in the instructions of teachers. And that for this healthful, moral, and indirect religious influence to which they all bear witness, dependence is placed *first* upon the moral and religious character of instructors themselves; Mr. Everett remarking, that "public opinion requires of all such a constant observance of all the practical duties of morality and religion: and *secondly*, to use the language of Mr. Winthrop, upon "the recognition of God and His Word, in the daily prayer or reading of the Scriptures, with which our Schools are commonly opened."

The question, then, *what kind of men* in the social and civil relations of life, the children of this Commonwealth are to be, is largely determined in our Common Schools.

"Shades of the prison-house begin to close
Upon the growing boy;"

and soon these young candidates for places of influence, trust, and honor, are exemplifying in the larger world, the principles which they have practiced upon the benches and floor of the school-room: the lad who speculated in toys and jack-knives, becomes a country dealer in "Dry Goods and Groceries;" the best runner or wrestler gets into the army or navy; the adipose and indolent are installed in hotels as hostlers or landlords; the umpires sit as judges; the critical and thorough instruct in Colleges; the best speakers figure at the bar; while the plodding, the industrious and the good, are with one consent consigned to the pulpit; or remain contentedly at home, cultivating the paternal acres. *Somewhere* and in *some capacity*, they submit to what Wordsworth calls "the inevitable yoke"—go under their "earthly freight," and illustrate the principles of their childhood and youth.

Now, what Book is best fitted to make good citizens, legislators, civil officers, professional men, husbands, fathers and neighbors? Take the Bible simply as a manual of morals. Blot out the future. Forget every relation, but that of *man to man*. Where will you find such a system of morals as is involved in the injunctions, "All things whatsoever ye would that men should do to you, do ye even so to them!" and "Thou shalt love thy neighbor as thyself?" Would you have these children become patriotic and loyal? Would you have them truthful, honest and industrious? Would you have them filial to their parents, and affectionate and faithful in all their social relations? Where will you find these and kindred virtues, more invitingly set forth, or more frequently insisted on, than in the Bible? Indeed, what candid infidel would not subscribe to that sentiment of *Diderot*, who when a friend expressed surprise at finding him explaining a chapter of the Bible to his daughter, replied, "I understand you: but in truth, what better lesson could I give her?" One of the finest tributes ever paid to the purity of the Word of God. The infidel claimed that there was no God, no inspiration, no immortality, no hereafter. The *father* acknowledged, that granting all this, there was no Book in the universe, which was better for his daughter—there was no Book, which he himself preferred to have her instructed in, rather than in the Bible!

And here is the point, where we should look at the condition of that large foreign element, which is poured in upon us year after year. We are not asking, "How they may be made good Protestants?" But, simply, "How may they become valuable citizens?" It is admitted on all hands, that they have no moral training at home—that in the uninviting shanties of their parents, they have sad lessons in

the worst of practices—that broils and carousals, thefts and even murders are probable occurrences. We have seen, to what source, some of our most intelligent and observing statesmen, attribute the past prevailing morality of New England: namely, to the lessons imparted in our Common Schools! and especially to that indescribable moral power which belongs to the Word of God. And, now, can we, dare we, take this new, crude, and even hostile element in our civilization, without subjecting it to the same transforming influence? If these strangers plant themselves down as our neighbors—if they send their children to associate with ours in the same schools, and same classes, shall we not kindly insist upon their submitting to the same moral culture, in preparation for the same birth-right? I have no fears of this Celtic barbarism, if we are but allowed to give it the moral and intellectual training of New England. What makes the difference between Scotland and Ireland to-day? Says Dr. Chalmers, “Our country is indebted to her schools and her Bibles for the most intelligent and virtuous peasantry in Europe:” and again, “The exemption of Scotland from the miseries of pauperism, is due to the education which their people receive at schools, and to the Bible, which their scholarship gives them access to.” Let these same young children of Erin, be thoroughly indoctrinated in God’s Word as a book of morals, and poverty and vice among them, will soon give place to thrift and virtue. Two generations of New England breeding—two generations of faithful instruction in our Common Schools, would make a vast change in the character of this portion of our population.

But after all that may be said in favor of the Literary and Moral Claims of the Bible to a place in our Schools; notwith-

standing the desirableness of correct models of thought and style; and of pure and sound precepts of morality; in some measure, these may be found elsewhere. Other writers have furnished what might in these respects, possibly do as a substitute, were we without the Word of God. We should indeed, lose its Divine adaptation to different classes and individuals, in the various circumstances of life; that surprising spirit and diction, which constantly invest it with the charm of novelty, and which as Robert Hall says, fit it to be “heard in public assemblies from year to year, with an attention that never tires, and an interest that never cloys.” But still, these are not the highest claims of the Bible. It has one infinitely more important—more indispensable—more authoritative. I mean its Religious Claim.

The Bible is the only Book in which God has revealed to man, His character, purposes and law. It is the statute-book of the court of Heaven—designed for all men, and adapted to the supply of their spiritual and eternal necessities. No human enactment can have proper jurisdiction to restrict or restrain it. Every creature of God has a right to it, as absolute as his right to the very air he breathes, and to the sights and sounds with which his senses are gratified. God has indeed revealed Himself in His works. In this earth which He has fashioned, rich with internal wealth, and glorious with outward beauty—in every tree that lifts its majestic form, and claps its tumultuous hands—in every wild-flower that peers tremblingly and yet trustfully up to heaven, from among the coarse grasses—in every dew-drop that falls from the maize, or glistens on the mower’s scythe—in the varied landscape—the rugged mountains, the rounded hills, and the sloping vales—in the brook, the river, the lake, the ocean—everywhere, we discover the

proof of His existence, the marks of His presence, and the display of His infinite attributes. And this open volume of God is man's—belongs to every individual in the human family—cannot be appropriated by the great and powerful—may be seen from the door of the hovel, as well as from the portals or the observatory of the mansion.

And the same common property—the same inalienable possession of man, is God's *written* Word—this only volume in which the Creator puts His own infinite spirit *en rapport* with the spirit of His short-sighted and erring creatures—a volume addressed not simply to the whole human race, but to every individual heart of man, and containing what is of infinite importance for him to know and believe. This Book is *man's*, just as much as is the air, the light, the breath of the flowers, all natural sights and sounds. These are His revelation in *hieroglyphics*. That is His revelation in words. In these He shows the Creator—in that He discloses the Father. The Bible is the natural right of every creature that God has made. Has the subject a right to the system of laws, by which he is governed? Then has man a right to the Bible. Has the child a right to the last will and testament of his deceased father? Then has man a right to the Bible. Legislation that interferes with the Law of God, on its way to every heart and conscience, involves the conflict of man's jurisdiction with that of God—involves tyranny not over bodies, but over souls—strips a man, not simply of his temporal rights, but of those that are eternal.

What is this education with which the Common Schools of New England—of Vermont, undertake to furnish our children? Is it education to train the hand and the head, without regard to the condition of the heart? Says Dr. Ryerson,

the distinguished Superintendent of Public Instruction, in Canada West, "Man has a higher destiny than that of states; for they are born, and live and die upon earth—man survives the earth, and is created for higher employments, and higher distinction and happiness than the earth affords. It is not state legislation, but religious truth that reveals to him his immortal nature, and provides the proper food for its nourishment, and perfection. Religious instruction is therefore an essential part of the education of every human being." Said Mr. Webster in the Massachusetts Convention for Revising the Constitution, "I rejoice that every man in the community can call all property his own, so far as he has occasion for it, to furnish for himself and his children the blessings of religious instruction and the elements of knowledge. This celestial and this earthly light he is entitled to, by the fundamental law. It is the poor man's undoubted birthright; it is the great blessing which the constitution has secured to him; it is his solace in life, and it may well be his consolation in death, that his country stands pledged by the faith which it has plighted to all its citizens, to protect his children from ignorance, barbarism and vice."

Does that deserve to be called a system of education, which does not provide religious, as well as intellectual instruction? Here are creatures, whose stay upon earth is confined to the briefest period of time; shall they be taught nothing of the unlimited future which is before them; whose relation to God is a thousand-fold more intimate and important than their relations to man or the state: shall they know nothing of this God, and the character of this relation? And yet we call them educated when they are skilled in casting up accounts; can write a legible hand; and read the constitution and statutes under

which they live. Is this our ideal conception of the end of the Common School System of New England? We have educated the fingers in chirography, and the head to do a certain inferior kind of thinking. In other words, we have furnished these young candidates with the means of protecting themselves from encroachments upon their rights of property—with the knowledge how to make money, and how to keep it. If this is all that the state proposes, she only puts dangerous weapons into the hands of her citizens, and teaches the art of using them. Will she suffer the period, in which religious impressions may be best made—and when if they are once made, they will never be obliterated—will she suffer this period to pass away without improving it? Does she flatter herself that the blessings of civil freedom are secure, so long as the majority have this modicum of intellectual culture, whatever their views in morals and religion?

I claim that the State cannot answer her own temporary ends—cannot make her citizens temperate, industrious and honest, without inculcating upon the minds of her children and youth, the principles of the Christian religion—without teaching them to recognize God as their Maker and their Judge—without convincing them that their obligations to each other, are really obligations to Him. By taxing the property of her citizens for educational purposes, the State agrees to furnish for the children and youth within her limits such an intellectual and moral training as will secure them against everything which disturbs the peace, decreases the happiness, or endangers the life of community. And this cannot be done without urging upon them the sanctions of religion—without instructing them to fear God and keep His commandments. Morality has no sure foundation but religion.

If the state would have her citizens obedient to human laws, she must teach them reverence for the law of God. Morality—true morality is conduct toward man, which is subjected to the principles of the christian religion. Man loves his neighbor as himself, only when, and because, he loves the Lord his God with all his heart.

Much less can the state look out upon her unnumbered towns, and villages, and hamlets, and homes—filled with a population upright, moral, and religious—where morning and evening is illustrated that scene of domestic virtue so inimitably described in, "The Cotter's Saturday Night"—and feel that her strength and her grandeur consist in these intelligent and upright hearts—unless she provide for the Christian instruction of her children and youth. The effect which a belief in the Bible, produces upon the thrift and happiness of a people, finds appropriate and emphatic illustration in New England. Nor will it be claimed by any one, that so far as the truths of God's Word have a tendency to make a nation stable, contented and prosperous, it is beyond the province of the government, to encourage a general acquaintance with them. And can it be for one moment questioned, that the individual whose heart is at rest respecting the great realities of eternity, and who daily acts with reference to them, is better prepared for the discharge of all the duties incumbent on him in the civil and social relations of life? Would not even the principles of political economy, dictate the religious instruction of a people!

But, as already intimated, in the education of immortal creatures we are not to content ourselves with the training of the intellect, or with the material prosperity of the present life. The soul that is shut off from the Word of God, is deprived of the only medium of direct communication

with the Creator—fails of the great end of learning, which according to Milton “is to repair the ruin of our first parents, by requiring to know God aright, and out of that knowledge to love Him and imitate Him.” The soul must have this spiritual acquaintance with God, or perish forever. It must know God and Jesus Christ whom He has sent, or it can have no hope of heaven. This knowledge it must obtain in the present life—or never. These truths we have on the authority of God Himself. To impart this knowledge to the soul of man, God has given His Word. And can that form of government be called Christian, even in the lowest sense of the word, which makes no provision for such instruction—nay, which does not give it the sanction of its highest authority—which does not guard it with the greatest vigilance?

To furnish specific religious instruction, is indeed primarily the duty of parents. But is it not a wise and benevolent policy for the state, both for her own sake, and for the sake of her neglected population, to see to it, that God’s Word, just as He has addressed it to the human heart—that the great fundamental truths of the Christian system—truths embraced by all denominations, are recognized and enforced in our Common Schools? This has been the settled policy, thus far, in the history of New England. The Bible has had its psirtion of preeminence as the Book of books, to faeilitate an acquaintance with which, was the end and object of all intellectual knowledge. Indeed this was the original purpose in the establishment of our Common Schools and Colleges—to prepare the human mind to understand and expound the great doctrines of the Bible. The Christian system has been adopted—its claims advocated—its duties recommended—the importance of its maintenance solemnly urged, by nearly all the ——— founders of our republic.

Said Washington in his “Farewell Address,” “Of all the dispositions and habits which lead to national prosperity, religion and morality are indispensable supports. In vain would that man claim the tribute of patriotism, who should labor to subvert these great pillars of human happiness—these purest props of the duties of men and citizens. The mere politician equally with the pious man ought to respect and cherish them. And let us with caution indulge the supposition that morality can be maintained without religion. Whatever may be conceded to the influence of refined education on minds of peculiar structure, reason and experience both forbid us to expect that national morality can prevail in exclusion of religious principle.” In the same spirit, the framers of the United States’ Constitution have recorded their opinion of the relation of schools to morality and religion in the following sentence: * “Religion, morality and knowledge being necessary to good government and the happiness of mankind, schools and the means of education shall forever be encouraged.” And if it is one design of our system of Common Schools, to teach the people the principles of morality and religion, what text-book can compare with the Bible?

But, it is said in opposition to the use of the Bible in our Schools, that it is a Protestant book—a sectarian book—and therefore, to make it a text-book, or even to employ it for the purposes of devotion in our schools, is an infringement upon the rights of conscience. We might dismiss this objection very summarily, by saying that if the Bible is a sectarian treatise, so much the worse for those sects, that do not find their tenets sustained by it—and so much the better for Protestantism! But, the Bible is the most unsectarian book in the world! It was written

* Ordinance of 1787.

by the great Father and Maker of all creatures, for all His children. Could anything be more catholic than this? But, it is replied, that the version in use in this country, is sectarian. Who began the English version of the Bible? Was not Wickliffe a Roman Catholic? Were not Tyndale, Coverdale and Matthew members of the same communion? Who but the Roman Catholic Henry the Eight—Roman Catholic, though apostate from the Pope—permitted it to be printed and circulated? Who but a Roman Catholic Bishop drafted the license to read it, until a better translation should be provided, what he hoped, “would not be until doomsday?” And this English version of the Bible, translated by Roman Catholics and sent forth under the seal of Roman Catholic Bishops, and a Roman Catholic king, is the basis of the translation made by the authority of King James—our own unequalled English Bible—a translation pronounced by Dr. Geddes, himself a Catholic and a translator of the Scriptures, “of all versions the most excellent for accuracy, fidelity, and the strictest attention to the letter of the text.”

But if Roman Catholics would not have our English version of the Bible in the hands of their children, they have a version of their own—the only sectarian Bible! Let them give this to the pupils from their families. They certainly should not object to the use of that version which has been put forth by Mother Church herself. But if the truth be told, Rome is almost as reluctant to have the Douay Bible in the possession of her communion, as the English. It is not the particular version which is so obnoxious. It is the Book itself. This, the Papal church has always claimed is not a suitable book for the people. It gives them too much light! In the language of the Bishops of Bologna, in an advisory letter to Paul III., whose

papal reign extended from A. D. 1534—1549,—the period of the most energetic progress of the reformation,—she is persuaded that, “This is the book which above all others, raises such storms and tempests. And that truly, if any one read it, and observe her own customs and practices, he will see that there is no agreement between them; and that the doctrine which she preaches is altogether different from, and sometimes contrary to that contained in the Bible.” I repeat it: This is no question of versions—but of the Book itself. And will New England, will Vermont connive at this attempt to keep God’s Word from the heart and conscience of His creatures?

*Let us glance, for a moment, at the present status of the Bible in our schools; a subject to which in his Report of 1859, the Secretary of the Board of Education especially invites the attention of the citizens of this State. In discussing the case of two Irish boys at Island Pond, who in accordance with the instructions of their parents, declined to participate in the general school-exercise of reading in the Scriptures, the Secretary takes the position, that the Bible can be read in our schools, in but two ways; either as an act of devotion, or as a text-book for reading. To enforce its devotional use upon remonstrating Papists, he claims is contrary to the Bill of rights: which states that “all men have a natural and inalienable right to worship God according to the dictates of their own consciences and understandings,—as in their opinion shall be regulated by the Word of God.” Mark the last clause, a clause in which our State Constitution is unlike any other in the land: “*as in their opinion shall be regulated by the Word of God!*” Is not this a most distinct and emphatic recognition of the supremacy of

*Several of the following paragraphs have been written out more fully since the Address was first delivered

the Word of God, over the human conscience and understanding? And what Papist ever pretended that God's Word interdicts its own use in acts of religious worship? Does not this Article of the Bill of Rights expressly provide that such acts shall be regulated by the Word of God; or, as is expressed in other terms at the conclusion of the Article, by the revealed will of God? And in the other clauses of the same Article, is it not legitimate to conclude that it recognizes no other worship, as worship; that it grants the protection of the State only to such worship? Now, with what propriety can an argument against the use of the Bible in acts of devotion, be drawn from such language as this? Indeed, in this whole Article, is not Christianity, the Christianity of the Bible, recognized and established as the Law of the State?

Nor is this any new position. The Christian religion is regarded as a part of the Common Law, both in England and in the United States.* This was the basis of Mr. Webster's argument in the famous Girard Will case.† Says Dr. Hickok: "The State has, and must have, its distinctive religious creed. It must use religion and appeals to conscience and future retributions, or it cannot attain its end in the conservation of the public freedom." "A Theistic nation may thus incorporate into its national education, the religious acknowledgement of a personal God; a Christian nation may use the Gospels as a text-book; a Protestant nation may use the Bible in the public schools; and thus carry out the public choice according to the public conscience, in its system of popular education for public freedom's sake; and in this, its authority is as legitimate as in any civil legislation, and all conflicting cases of conscience must be regarded as bearingly as the public freedom will

admit. The same is true on the opposite side. The infidel, or the Catholic State, with the sole end of freedom in view, may for freedom's sake, and not for religion's or irreligion's sake, exclude the Gospels and the Protestant Scriptures from their schools, in the honest conviction, if they have it, that an education otherwise conducted will induce an intelligence hostile to public liberty, and progress in civilization; and the Christian and the Protestant must appeal to an ultimate tribunal, and abide the consequences."‡

And this is the view taken of the subject by not a few intelligent Catholics. Said Mr. McGrorty, in the Minnesota Convention for amending the Constitution, himself an Irishman and a Catholic:

"I am a little surprised to hear any gentleman in this enlightened age, opposed to having religious instruction in our Common Schools. It seems to me that the descendants of the old religion-loving Puritans of New England, are degenerating very fast, if they consider their children unworthy to be taught religion in the Primary Schools. If it is for the benefit of the Catholics, that religion is to be excluded from our schools, I say it is pandering too much to us! I have far more dread of the infidelity and skepticism, which are spreading abroad through the land, than I have of any sectarianism. I hope, therefore, you will adopt no provision by which religion shall not be taught in the Public Schools."§

The State of Vermont has, in her organic law, instituted the Word of God—the revealed Will of God—as the ultimate appeal in matters of religious worship. And the individual conscience that sets itself up as above this organic law, arrays itself against public freedom, interferes with the public conscience, and estimates its own

*Blackstone, Vol. I V., p. 60, with Note.

† Webster's Works, Vol. VI.

‡Moral Science, pp. 249 and 50.
§Constitutional Debates: officially reported by F. H. Smith, Esq., Washington, D. C.

rights, as of more consequence than the rights of a whole people. Shall a State be compelled to dishonor its own recognized religion—that of the Bible—lest it come into collision with the rights of individual consciences; What are these rights of conscience, intended to be covered by the provisions of the Constitution? “Simply a right to worship the Supreme Being according to the dictates of the heart; to adopt a creed, or hold any opinion whatever on the subject of religion, and to do or forbear to do any act, the doing or forbearing of which is not prejudicial to the public weal. But *salus populi suprema* is a maxim of universal application; and when liberty of conscience would interfere with the paramount rights of the public, it ought to be restrained. Even Thomas Jefferson, than whom a more resolute champion of liberty never lived, claims no indulgence for anything that is detrimental to human society, though it springs from a religious belief, or no belief at all.”¶

The Board of Education concur in the position “that moral culture resting upon Bible truth as its only safe basis, is a matter of the highest moment in all our schools; and, therefore, that a Scripture lesson read by the Teacher is in the highest degree desirable, as an opening and closing exercise in the schools.” If now, the State yield to the conscientious scruples of the Romanist, must she not also to those of the Unitarian, who insists that in the English Bible, there have been interpolations and mistranslations favoring the doctrine of the Trinity; and to those of the Baptists, who will have *baptizo* translated immerse? And what better will it be, even if all who object to the common English version are excused from actual participation in the act of reading? Will compulsory attendance upon an act

of worship performed by others, be any the less a violation of the Bill of Rights, than if the act were performed by oneself? Will the English version read by a part of the school, or by the Teacher, be any the less an infringement upon the rights of conscience, than if read by oneself? Would not a consistent carrying out of the position of the Board of Education effectually exclude the Bible from the Common Schools of Vermont? This would be its legitimate result. If the Irish boys at Island Pond may be excused from *reading* the Scriptures, they may be excused from *hearing it read!* they may insist that it shall not be read *within school hours, or in their presence!* And is not this precisely the case covered by the decision of Chief Justice Gibson, where he says that when “liberty of conscience would interfere with the paramount rights of the public, it ought to be restrained?”

But, let us suppose that the interpretation which the Secretary puts upon the Bill of Rights, is correct. The Board of Education, “after protracted, earnest and thorough discussion, have unanimously concurred in deeming it inexpedient to recommend the Bible as a text-book for reading.” The legislature had given them authority to prescribe the list of text-books to be used in our schools for four years to come. The books that they should recommend for general use in the schools of Vermont, and only these, unless previously in use, would have a legal and authoritative basis, and could be enforced. This is implied in the Secretary’s Report,* as well as in his letter to the Town Superintendant at Island Pond; notwithstanding his late extraordinary position. “*That no power on earth could enforce the use of any text-book contrary to the wishes of parents;*” a position, at war with the fundamental principles of government in our schools,

¶ Chief Justice Gibson, of Penn.

* Report for 1859, pp. 18–35

which regard the State in the person of the Teacher, as in *loco parentis*; which make the Teacher amenable not to parents, but to those whom the State has placed in jurisdiction over him. The Bible might have been put upon this foundation. The Board were "solicited by correspondents of a high character," to put it there. They deliberated, and concluded that it was not expedient to do so. The Secretary's interpretation of the Bill of Rights precludes it from being enforced as a book of devotion. What status, what claim, what right by law, has the Bible, in the Common Schools of Vermont, to-day? None at all. If used, it is only by sufferance; and because no one objects to it. What status had it before? Up to this period in the history of our schools, no one has ever supposed that the use of the Bible, "as an opening and closing exercise," was, or could be in violation of any one's rights of conscience. So far then, as the Reports of the Board and their Secretary are circulated; and so far as the authority of their views is regarded conclusive, they have weakened the confidence of community in the power of government to enforce the devotional use of the Bible in our schools. They have used the influence of their position, to give a new direction to public sentiment upon this subject. Hitherto, under the late Statute, the various Boards of County Superintendents in the State, could recommend the Bible, to be used, as the Board of Education deem it highly desirable that it should be used, without the slightest suspicion, that they were contravening the Constitutional rights of the citizens of Vermont. This was the previous status of the Bible in our Schools. By and with the advice of the District Committee, any Teacher felt that he would be sustained by the decision of the highest Courts, in enforcing its use as an act of devotion. But so long as the attitude of

the Board upon this subject, remains unchanged, what Teacher would venture to exercise authority, in such premises;—what Teacher will feel like insisting that remonstrating Catholics either read it, or hear it read?

But, supposing the use of the Bible for devotional purposes, entirely out of the question; why might it not, in perfect consistency with what the Board have felt authorized to do and have done, have been recommended by them as a text-book for reading? Why might it not have been included in the list with Town and Helbrook's Readers? Are the selections from George P. Marsh, Robert Hall, and Dr. Judson—all of which are unqualified in their advocacy of the high claims of the Bible—are these and other kindred selections to be found in the series of Readers made obligatory, any the less Protestant, any the less sectarian, because they are uninspired? And, yet, if an Irish pupil should refuse to read them, on the plea of conscientious scruples, he might be expelled from the school; and his father would thus be "deprived, or abridged of his civil rights as a citizen, on account of his peculiar religious sentiments"—*the very state of things*, which the Secretary makes a reason, why the Bible cannot be made obligatory in our schools. Now, why this special favor to Town and Holbrook, which is denied to God's Word? Why is the Bible thus practically, though indirectly displaced from its immemorial position of honor and authority in our schools? If the Secretary's interpretation of Art. III. of The Bill of Rights be correct, would not a comprehensive Christian statesmanship have dictated, the recommendation of God's Word, as a text-book for daily reading? Are Vermonters satisfied with the present statu, which the decision and arguments of the Secretary of the Board of

Education, have given to the Bible? Shall the prejudices of foreign ecclesiastics deprive those who will soon be our citizens, of this inspired birth-right of New England—this only acknowledged safeguard of our civil and religious freedom? If so, they strike a death-blow at the moral and religious influence of our Common Schools.

The Board of Education, through their Secretary—who is instructed by the Statute creating his office, “in his exertions to promote the highest interests of Education,” to act “by and with their advice”—have already done something, to give shape to public opinion upon this great subject. This, of course, they had the right to do—and have been conscientious in doing. No one would charge them with a single unworthy motive. But, they cannot be ignorant that their position—as expressed by their Secretary—is unsupported by the decisions of the Courts. They cannot be ignorant that the Supreme Court of Maine have decided that “a rule requiring every scholar to read a particular version of the Bible, (though it may be against the consciences of some to do,) violates neither the letter nor the spirit of the Constitution”—that to be required to hear the Bible read by others, is just as much a violation of the rights of conscience as to be required to read it—that the right to bring conscientious objections to the use of the Bible, implies the same right to object to other text-books, and belongs to one scholar as much as to another*—principles, some of which if for one moment admitted, must put legislation upon the subject of school-books entirely at the mercy of pupils and their parents—and must undermine the power of the State to enforce the laws which she makes.

It is true that these decisions relate to

* Donahoe vs. Richards et al. Maine Reports. 1859, p. 18; Vide also. Decision in the case of “The Elliot School rebellion.”

the use of the Bible as a text-book in Reading. But it will be seen from referring to the Report of the Board† that the Board anticipated the same difficulties in enforcing the Bible as a text-book for Reading, as when used for devotional purposes. And this is actually the case. It makes no difference with the Romanist, when or how the Bible is read. His objections rest against its use at all! His conscience is violated as much by one use of it, as by another, by the use of it, by another in his hearing, as by himself.

With all deference then, to the Board of Education, and with not the slightest suspicion of their hostility to the use of the Bible in our schools, I feel compelled to object to their present position :

1. Because, through their Secretary, they have given a quasi-judicial interpretation of the Bill of Rights, which is subversive of the principle that Bible Christianity is the law of the State—and which, if sustained, will accord to the Mohammedon, Mormon and Hindoo, the “natural and inalienable right” to practice the abominations of their religious systems, within our own borders.

2. Because this position appears inconsistent with itself. The Board regard it inexpedient to recommend the use of the Bible as a text-book for Reading, because it might necessitate coercive measures of enforcement. They have recommended books equally obnoxious to consistent Catholics, as the Bible itself.

3. Because this position, consistently carried out, will wholly exclude the Bible from our schools. By implication, the Board admit that it may be regarded a violation of the rights of conscience, to enforce the *reading* of the Bible upon the children of remonstrating Catholics. We have seen, above, that according to the decisions of the Supreme Court of Maine, it is just as much a violation of the rights

of conscience, to be compelled to hear the Bible read, as to read it—and that if Roman Catholics may object to King James' version, so also may Unitarians and Baptists.

4. Because the present and increasing disuse of the Bible by teachers not professedly religious, calls upon the Board of Education to take a positive and emphatic position in its favor. Who can doubt that the published fact, that the Board after careful deliberation and discussion, unananimously concluded not to recommend the use of the Bible as a text-book, has weakened its position in the minds of community at large? If it is advisable for Teachers to use it, ought it not to be officially recommended to them? Ought it not to be used in our Teachers' Institutes? Ought not its use to be made the subject of statistical inquiry by the Secretary? Ought not its use to be enforced by him in his stirring addresses to the people?

5. Because, if their position is carried to its legitimate conclusion, it will involve the subjection of the public conscience, to the conscience of a few individuals—and will render State legislation upon the subject of Schools, a nullity.

6. Because it grants to the Papist all that he claims, and while he comes to this country with a conscience under allegiance to another sovereign,† allows him to be faithful to this allegiance, contrary to his oath at the time of naturalization, and in opposition to the Common Law of the land. It is the policy of Catholic Church to keep the Bible from the people; and it is the policy of this nation to put it into their hands.

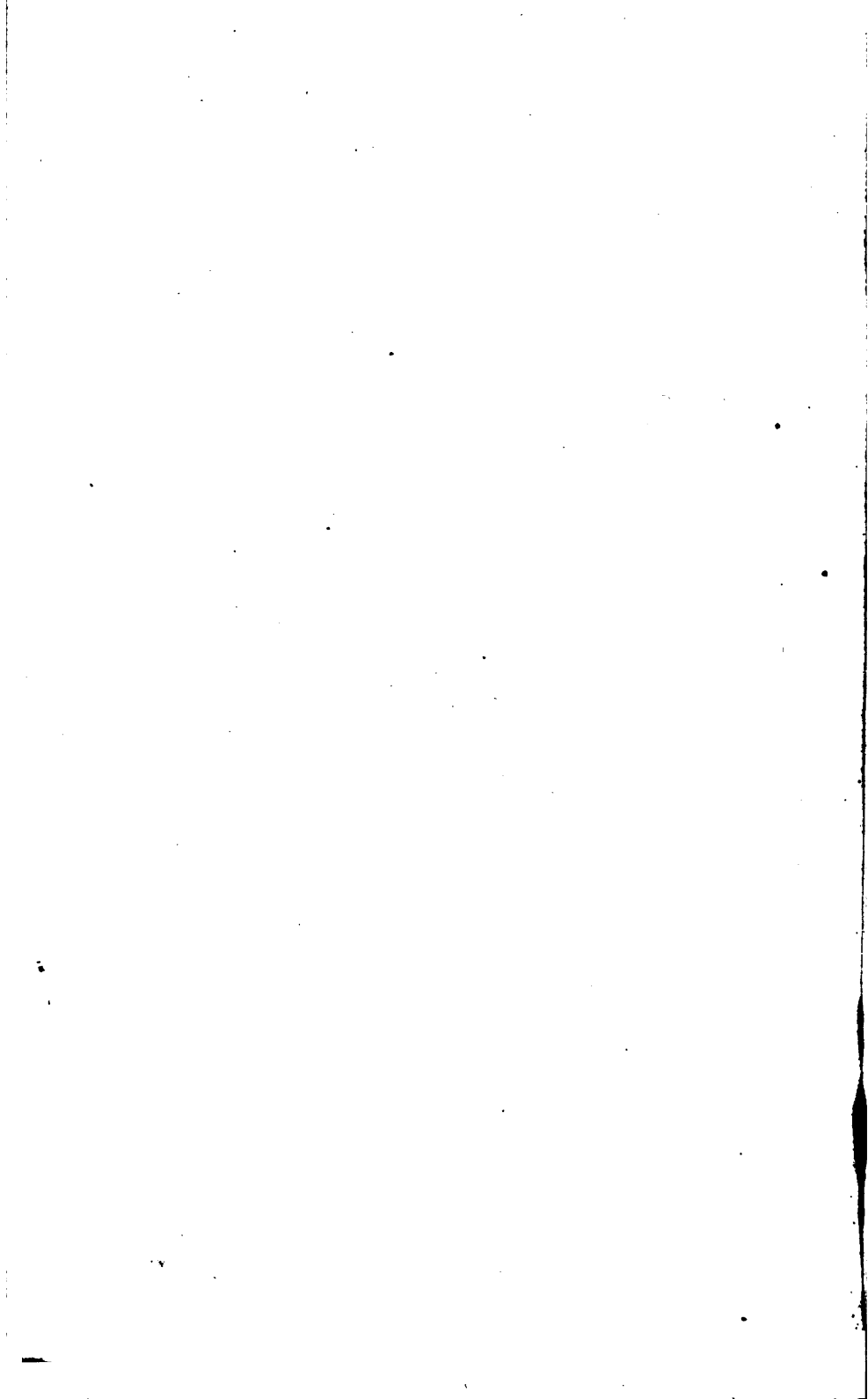
7. Because it is contrary to the immemorial policy of the Common School system of New England—which has been, at all hazards, to insist upon the authoritative use of the Bible in our Common

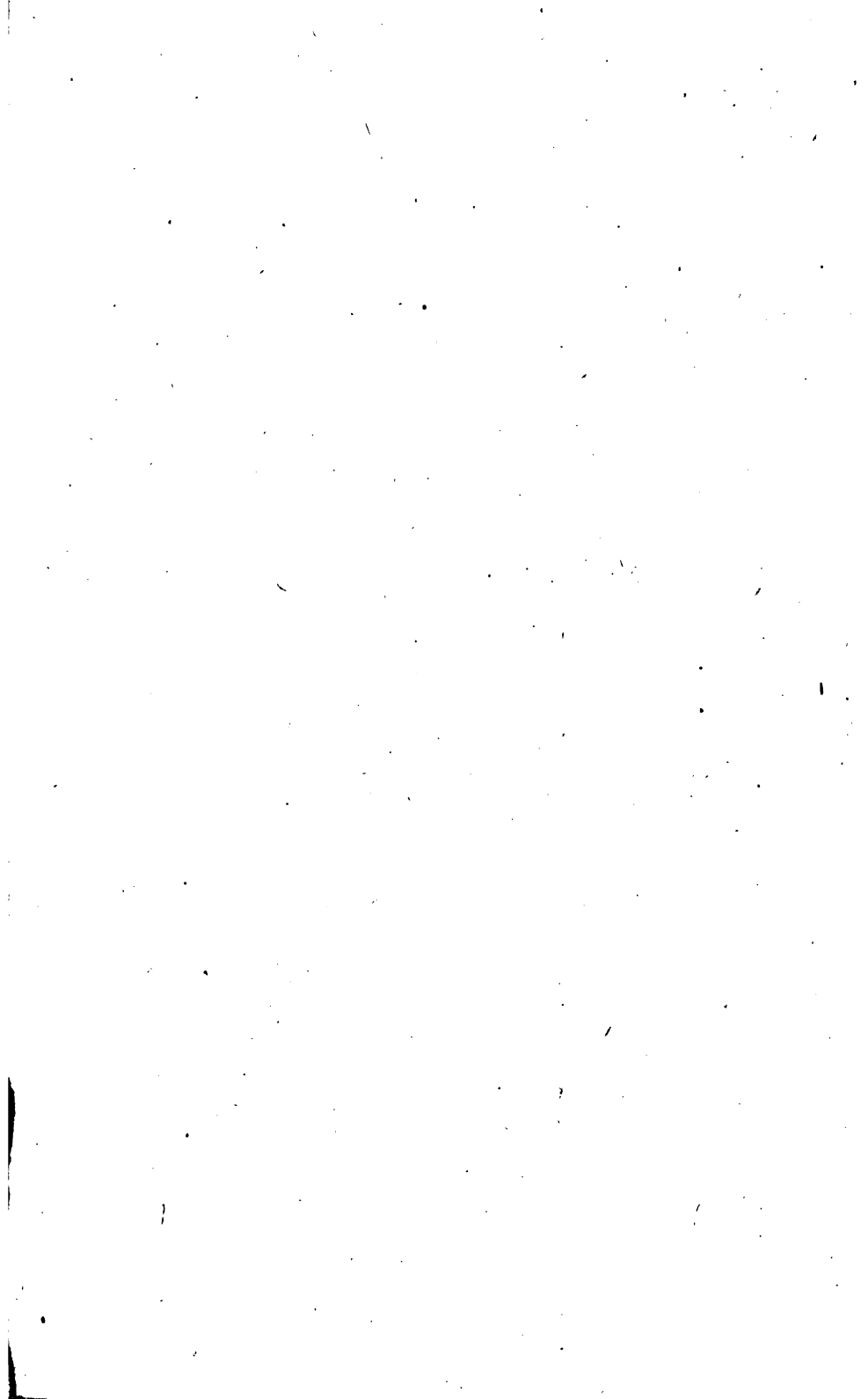
Schools. The fact that legislation and judicial decisions on this subject are of recent date, arises from the circumstance that until very lately, no one has questioned this immemorial right and usage. While, thus far, so far as has been ascertained all decisions of Courts are unanimous in sustaining it.

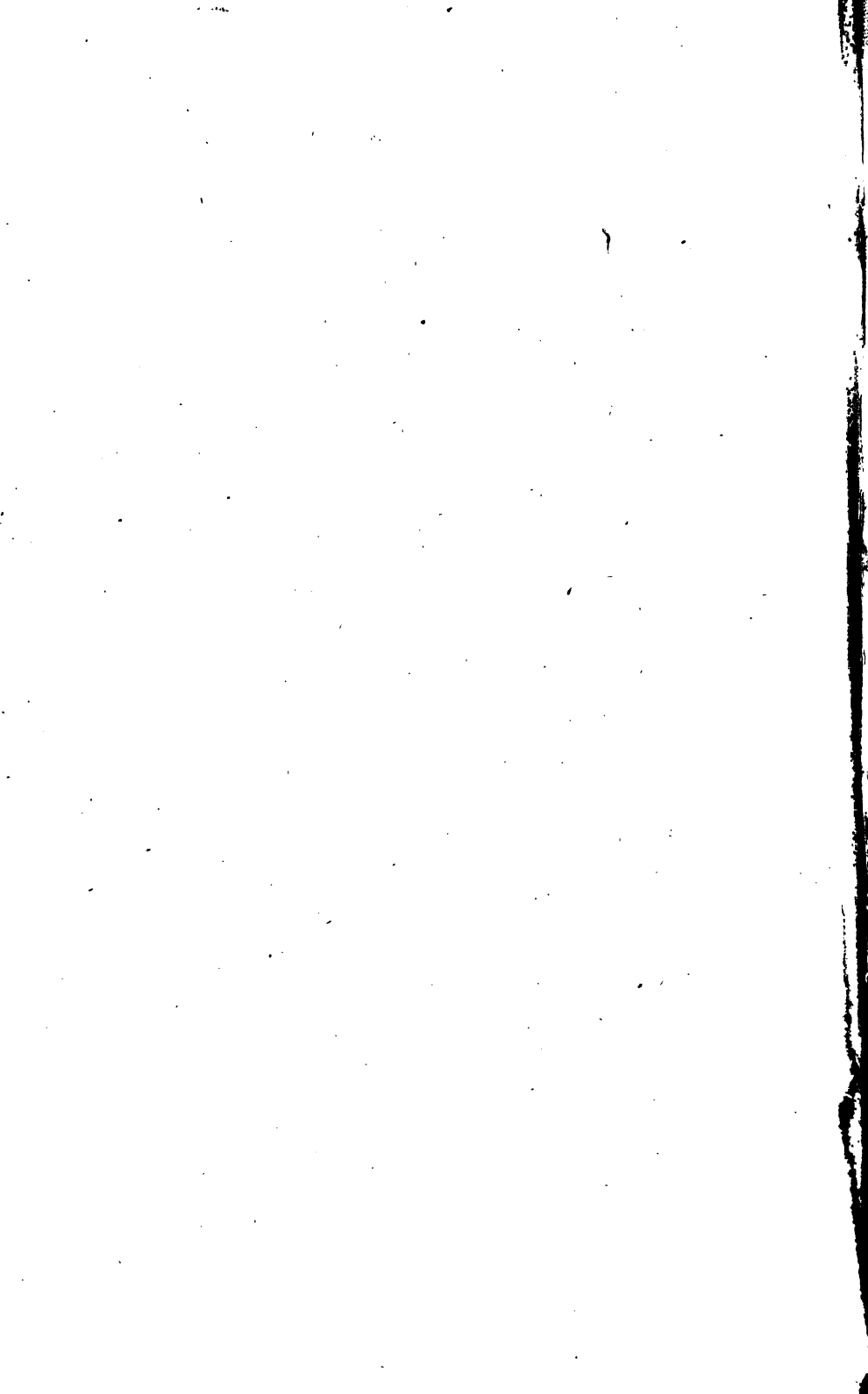
It is wholly foreign from my intention, to speak disrespectfully of the acts of The Board of Education. And for the Secretary himself I cherish the sentiment of hearty respect; while I congratulate him upon his eloquence, laboriousness and enthusiasm, and above all, upon his thorough acquaintance with Vermont character, and his success in awakening the citizens of this State to some sense of the value of their Common School privileges: and yet, in his anxiety not to provoke the hostility of Papists, it seems to me he has, inadvertently, I am willing to believe, yet practically, yielded up, without the show of resistance or defence, an inalienable right of Protestant Vermont—the right to keep the Bible in its original position of dignity and authority—the right to leaven every element that would enter into our civilization, with the precepts of infinite wisdom and love—he has actually denied the recognition made in the Bill of Rights, that in Vermont the Word of God is the supreme law in matters of morality and religion. To insist upon this right and this recognition it is not sectarianism—this is only taking the stand of all the eminent founders of our civil institutions, that there is a God—and that He has revealed His perfect law—and that the only security for us as a nation, is to have this law read, respected and obeyed by our citizens. In this respect, we cannot be wiser than our fathers. Let us beware of deviating from the established policy of New England—which experience has proved so salutary, and to which time has set her

seal of sanction. Let us maintain the position, that Christianity—a tolerant, charitable, Bible Christianity is the law of the State. Let us not be deceived into the conception, that to ignore the claims of God's Word to a place in our schools, and to ignore its infinite importance both for the temporal and spiritual welfare of our children—is liberality. Let us not imagine that in order to secure to others their rights of conscience *under* the Bible, it is necessary to deprive ourselves and our children of those, which are so precious to us, and to them—it is necessary to give the Scriptures an equivocal position, or a doubtful tenure in our Common Schools. Let us leave the instruction in peculiar tenets to parents and pastors, while we still insist that in this land, God's Word shall have an unobstructed avenue to every individual heart and conscience of our children. Let us protect the religion of the Bible, as those who love its Author;

who have a full sense of our indebtedness to Him and to His Word, for the blessed heritage which our fathers took possession of by faith and prayer—defended us under the banner of the Lord of Hosts—and bequeathed to us in trust for our children! And while we glory in our green hills, our bracing air, our well-stocked and well-worked farms, and our mechanical achievements—let us glory in that open Bible, which gives these material elements of beauty and prosperity, their real value—which reveals unto us God in Jesus Christ reconciling a world unto Himself, and thus opens unto us the portals of everlasting life. And let us take this young civilization of Vermont, committed to our guardianship—let us take all this native daring, and energy and strength—this intellectual activity and power—and at this fountain of God's Word, seek to baptize it into the spirit and temper of Jesus Christ our Lord!







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